

THOMAS CHALMERS AND HIS TIMES.

BY REV. PROF. ROSS, D.D., MONTREAL.

Dates: Born 1780; Matriculated in St. Andrews 1791; Licensed 1799; Ordained 1803; Tron Church 1815; St. John's 1819; Professor in St. Andrews 1823; in Edinburgh 1828; Ten Years' Conflict 1833-43; Disruption 1843; Died 1847.

Thomas Chalmers was the fourth son and the sixth child of a well-to-do family in Austruther, Fifeshire, where he was born on St. Patrick's Day, 1780. His life covers one of the transitional periods of Scottish Church History and among the movements and conflicts which ushered in the present state of things he is the central figure.

THE STUDENT.

His progress in his earlier studies was by no means remarkable. He was known as one of the idlest, strongest, and most generous-hearted boys in Austruther school.

He entered the University of St. Andrews at eleven, which is astonishing to us but was not uncommon then. This was his intellectual birth-place, for in his third year Mathematics took his fancy and fully roused his dormant faculties.

The tone of college thought caused him to pass from the conception of religion in which he had been trained, to a more liberal view. But all the time he was an essentially devout lad, full of rapture at the thought of the God-head pervading all things, and often going out in the early morning to luxuriate amidst the grandeur and beauty of nature as a means of communion with Jehovah.

It was here also that his natural gifts of oratory began to appear. Some of the class exercises in preaching were then conducted in one of the churches, which was generally well filled when it was known that he was to appear. After he was licensed he took a post-graduate course of two sessions in Edinburgh.

THE TEACHER.

He began life for himself as most Scottish college boys do, as a tutor in a wealthy man's household. In this position he was treated with a contumely which stung him to the quick, and which he vigorously resented.

His ardour and power of awakening enthusiasm by the exposition of truth, became fully apparent when he was appointed assistant to the professor of Mathematics in St. Andrews. The interest and excitement of his classes awoke the jealousy of the invalid professor whose place he was filling, and who took special pains to slight him. Chalmers fiercely retaliated and was dismissed.

Smarting under a sense of injury he opened independent classes in Mathematics and Chemistry and in spite of the studied opposition of the University authorities, they were highly successful for a whole session. He repeated his lectures of Chemistry—then a new thing—to his rural congregation and thereby obtained the reputation of being a warlock.

To the end of his life it was one of his deeper joys to inspire men by the vivid presentation of old truths, or by the unfolding of new views of nature, or of God.

THE PREACHER.

When he was settled in Kilmany, a small parish of Fifeshire, nine miles from St. Andrews, Chalmers was a "Moderate." This is the title applied in Scottish Church History to a party which pursued an easy-going policy in Church government and discipline, but in time it came to have a certain doctrinal signification also. Its creed has been tersely expressed in the sentence, "Do as well as you can and there is no fear of you."

Chalmers preached morality as a matter of conviction and duty with but little result. In preparing an article on Christianity for the Edinburgh Encyclopædia he became convinced that he had not fully apprehended all sides of the truth. A series of severe troubles, through which he passed, ending with a sickness which brought him to the verge of the grave and laid him aside from all active work for a year, deepened the impression. After many mental conflicts he returned to the creed of childhood and a personal reliance on the Redeemer.

His new conception of God in Christ graciously working out the salvation of men, produced, as it always does, a transformation of the whole life. When he resumed his work his marvellous enthusiasm glowed and burned in the proclamation of the Gospel. His characteristic power as a preacher may be said to date from this change.

His fame reached some of the leading men in the Tron Church, Glasgow. They came down to hear him and returned to make extraordinary efforts on his behalf, which finally resulted in his election by a small majority of the Town Council, so unpopular were evangelical doctrines in the high places of the Church.

HIS POWER.

His position as minister of one of the wealthiest congregations of Scotland, raised him to an eminence from which the splendor of his gifts spread his popularity far and wide. He hit a popular